TAG QUESTIONS IN BRITISH NEWS INTERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the types and functions of tag questions and how discourse participants use tag question for doing and displaying alignment and disalignment. A descriptive interpretative research method is used to analyze the data. There are four dialogues that the writer used to find data. They are drawn from Hardtalk, news programme shown on BBC World News and the BBC News Channel. From the analysis, the writer finds that the auxiliary in the tag agrees with the tense, aspect, and modality of the auxiliary verb in the anchoring clause. The polarity value of the preceding anchoring clause also affects that of the tag question: when the main clause is positive, the tag question is negative, and vice versa. The pronoun in the tag also agrees with the person, number, and gender value of the main clause's subject. There are two main functions of tag questions in British news interviews, confirmation and challenge. Discourse participants use tag questions both for inviting alignment, such as requesting confirmation and for doing disalignment actions such as challenges and disagreement.

Keyword: tag question, auxiliary, tense, aspect, modality, alignment, disalignment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tag question can play an important role in conversation between speakers and hearers. It is significant for both interlocutors to have common knowledge to communicate more effectively. The ability to understand what is being intended by tag question and to respond appropriately will enable interlocutor tremendously in their interaction. In this paper, the writer will analyze tag questions in British news interviews. Tag question has been studied extensively by many scholars (Biber et al., 2003; Mathhew, 1997; McArthur and McArthur, 1992; McCawley, 1998; Sinclair, 1990), but most of the studies used an informal conversation as a data. Up now, few scholars have paid attention to tag question in news interviews. For to that reason, the writer wants to analyze types and functions of tag questions in British news interviews and how discourse participants use tag questions for doing and displaying alignment and disalignment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature used in this study is firstly related to tag questions as the subject, and secondly to functions of tag questions and discourse participants position.

2.1 Tag Questions

Tag questions are frequent in many languages, but the type of tag question with reversed or constant polarity, as in (1) through (4), is typical of English. (Tottie and Hoffman, 2006: 283)

(1) *Makes you really think, doesn't it?*   *Positive–Negative (+/–)*
(2) *Oh it's not very valuable, is it?*   *Negative–Positive (–/+)*
(3) *So this is the letter he sent you, is it?*   *Positive–Positive (+/+)*
(4) *Yes, they don't come cheap, don't they?*   *Negative–Negative (–/–)*

This type of tag question consists of two clauses, an anchor and a tag. The subject in the anchor can be a full noun phrase, a pronoun, or there, but in the tag, it must be either a personal pronoun, there, or one. The verb in the anchor can be a lexical verb, an auxiliary, or a modal verb; the verb in the tag must be an auxiliary or a modal. The writer uses the term tag question for the combination of anchor and tag. There can be reversed polarity (positive–negative or negative–positive) in the anchor clause and the following question tag, as in (1) and (2); constant positive polarity, as in (3); or constant negative polarity, as in (4), a rare type whose existence has occasionally been questioned (see e.g., Quirk et al. 1985, 813). Reese and Asher (2006: 449) also state the type of tag question; "The surface syntax of tag questions consists of a juxtaposition of a declarative sentence, or anchor, with a reduced interrogative clause, or tag. The tag itself consists of a subject pronoun followed by an auxiliary (or modal) verb sharing the person, number and tense features of the anchor's matrix verb. If the anchor does not contain an auxiliary or modal verb, the appropriate form of do is inserted. The subject pronoun shares person, number and gender features with the subject of the anchor".

2.2 Functions of Tag Questions

Keisanen (2006:90-168) postulates four categories of tags: request for confirmation, assessment, challenging and others.

a. Request for confirmation (displaying of speaker's epistemic uncertainty). Discourse participants use tag questions for seeking alignment. Tag question constructions are used to present a candidate understanding, and to request that the recipient confirm or disconfirm it. (Keisanen, 2006:90)

b. Challenging (displaying doubt of recipient's knowledge or information). Tag questions are used in doing disalignment. The interrogative constructions are placed at a slot where they do not follow the trajectory of the ongoing or projected course of action. Such tag questions are typically used for making salient a

problem in the recipient's understanding or position with respect to some piece of information or knowledge. It is argued that the disaligning interrogative turns are based on calling into question a claim or a position embedded in the prior turn, and requesting that the recipient account for this observed discrepancy between the participants. (Keisanen, 2006:117)

c. Assessment, discourse participants use displays of evaluation embedded in negative yes/no interrogatives and tag questions for assessing and for doing alignment and disalignment. (Keisanen, 2006:147)

d. Others, a tag question is used to implement a suggestion and reporting. (Keisanen, 2006:168)

2.3 Alignment and Disalignment

Alignment refers to the ways in which discourse participants position themselves in view of the trajectories of action engendered by the prior turn of the sequence. More specifically, when a subsequent turn aligns with a prior turn, it, and the action it embodies, follows the projected course of action of the prior turn or the sequence (Keevallik 2003: 29). The absence of such alignment is considered to be an expression of disalignment. On the other hand, turns at talk may also be used to invite alignment in the next turn, and be thereby used in initiating or redirecting the talk towards some course of action. Alignment can be taken to refer to the ways in which the current speaker positions himself or herself in view of the trajectories of action engendered by the prior turn or the sequence. One can consider sequence organization to form the reference point for the study of alignment, as it allows one to examine alignment through the 'adjacency' relationship (Schegloff, 1988) between turns in interaction. Adjacency refers to a relationship between two turns in which any next turn displays an understanding of how the prior turn was heard and understood in the flow of ongoing interaction. An aligning turn can therefore be taken to support the progression of the sequence in a certain direction, while a disaligning turn provides an alternative or an oppositional course of action. Shalash (2009: 13-14) states that the interviewer expresses "disalignment" when they are not politically aligned with interviewee. Interviewer will show "alignment" with interviewee when they are politically aligned with them or when they happen to belong to the same membership category. Reporters who disalign with the speakers' stances do so by displaying explicit and implicit challenges, disapproval, and/or some form of criticism/accusation to what the interviewee had previously said in their initial briefing.

3. METHOD

The researcher uses qualitative method in this research. According to Cresswell (1994:2) qualitative is process of understanding social or human problems in complex building, holistic picture, formed in verbal languages. Similarly, Marvasti (2004: 7) states qualitative research describes and analyzes the quality of human experience. Using this

method, the writer's aim is to describe factual data and explain the character, situation of language phenomenon in order to a gain a systematic, factual and accurate data.

The data used in this study comes from Hardtalk. It is the hard-hitting flagship news programme shown on BBC World News and the BBC News Channel. The half hour interview is the result of detailed research and in-depth investigations. The data consists of 4 video recordings which vary in the term of the participants. The majority of the data used in this study come from news interview interaction. 42 tag questions of 4 speech events in the data are naturally occurring face-to-face interactions between interviewer and interviewee.

Each of the 42 tag questions was coded for the tag question in British news interviews, as well as syntax and pragmatic. At the level of syntax, the writer carefully examined the discourse in determining (i) whether the auxiliary in the tag agrees with the person, number and tense of the auxiliary verb in the anchoring clause; (ii) whether the polarity value of preceding anchoring clause also affect the tag question; and (iii) whether the pronoun in the tag also agrees with the person, number and gender value of main clause's subject. At the level of pragmatic, each tag was categorized as confirmation (displaying speaker's epistemic uncertainty) or challenge (displaying doubt toward recipient's knowledge).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part of the writing presents the result of the study and the discussion related to the result. The collected data from each question will consecutively be displayed first followed by the discussion to understand the result.

4.1 Requests for Confirmation

Interviewer uses tag question for seeking alignment. It begins by examining how tag questions are used to present a candidate understanding, and to request that interviewee confirms or disconfirms it.

Tim: *I meant more specifically romantic, because you actually proposed to your wife [seven day- seven days after meeting her, /didn't you?]*

Tony: *Oh yes, I I I met my wife on the second] of August and, being rather shy, I didn't propose for nine days and I have the bench in the front garden.*

The type of tag question consists of a juxtaposition of a declarative sentence *I meant more specifically romantic because you actually proposed to your wife seven day-seven days after meeting her* or anchor, with a reduced interrogative clause *didn't you?* or tag. The tag itself consists of a personal second pronoun *you* sharing the person, number and gender features with the subject of the anchor. The anchor does not contain an auxiliary or modal verb therefore the appropriate form of *do* is inserted in the tag. The type of tag question in the statement is positive polarity and the tag is negative polarity. Marker *yes*

after token *oh* shows alignment and agreement with Tim's assertion. This excerpt presents another case in which a confirmation request invites the recipient to provide a more extensive account regarding the topic of the confirmation request. The tag question *I meant more specifically romantic because you actually proposed to your wife seven day-seven days after meeting her, /didn't you?* is employed as a confirmation request in order to seek alignment with Toni.

Alan: It could come very unstuck. And it has.
Tim: People don't know that though, when they pay their money, /do they? ...N for their tickets.
Alan: They don't have a clue but you can feel it. (Laughs)

The type of tag question consists of a juxtaposition of a declarative sentence *people don't know that when they pay their money* or anchor, with a reduced interrogative clause *do they?* or tag. The tag itself consists of a personal third pronoun *they* followed by an auxiliary *do* verb sharing the person, number and tense features of the anchor's matrix verb. The subject pronoun *they* shares person, number and gender features with the subject of the anchor. The type of tag question in the statement is negative polarity and the tag is positive polarity. In this section, the tag question involves a request for an agreement that the recipient agrees or disagrees it. The occurrence of personal third pronoun *they* seems to be the case that Tim hesitates to make assertion about other people's awareness or opinions. Tim comes to a place of possible completion at the end of *do they?* The tag question receives a confirming they don't have a clue. Alan's response is repetition of entire proposition of Tim's assertion. The tag question *people don't know that though when they pay their money, /do they?* is used to seek alignment with Alan, and it embodies a display of epistemic doubt towards the interrogative Tim's own state of knowledge or understanding.

4.2 Challenge

Tag questions are used in doing disalignment. In this section, the challenges are directed toward the action implemented with the prior turn. It begins by discussing sequences in which tag questions are used to challenge the appropriateness or the relevance of doing action done in the prior turn.

Tim: You're anti-interventionalist, /aren't you? You were anti the gulf war, you were anti at [ta]
Tony: [I'm not] anti interventionalist. I'm just anti uh err imperial war I mean err Saddam Hussein was, armed by the British, armed by the American, supported by the British, the American ambassadors said to him.

The type of tag question consists of a juxtaposition of a declarative sentence but *you* resent the constraints or anchor, with a reduced interrogative clause *don't you?* or tag. The tag itself consists of a personal second pronoun *you* followed by an auxiliary *do* verb sharing the person, number and tense features of the anchor's matrix verb. The subject pronoun *you* shares person, number and gender features with the subject of the anchor. The type of tag question in the statement is positive polarity and the tag is negative polarity. Tim produces a tag question *you're anti-interventionalist, /aren't you?* It can be seen as a direct response to Tony attack on the media. Calling a person anti interventionalist is a subtle way of calling him weak, especially when talking to a radical left wing Marxist who has abandoned his inherited title to be able to retain his place in the House of Commons. The tag is not followed by any substantial silent pause. Tim continues his turn without allowing Tony to express his view or to confirm or disconfirm the claim.

Chandra:	*It is not enough. I agree six years is not a long time to finish with 17 years of state terror.*
Tim:	*But Mrs. Kumaratunga, your statement not once have you allowed any physical excesses against the Tamil people, it's misleading, /isn't it?*
Chandra:	*I'm telling you, you are taking it out of context. I was talking there, of what the last government did, and that we do not do that. That is organized groups of mafia to go and attack people, not once have we allowed, this is not what we are allowing, these are things that are happening as excesses and every time it has been brought to our notice we have taken the strictest action, against the perpetrators of such human rights violations.*

The type of tag question consists of a juxtaposition of a declarative sentence it's misleading or anchor, with a reduced interrogative clause *isn't it?* or tag. The tag itself consists of non-personal pronoun *it* followed by an auxiliary be verb sharing the person, number and tense features of the anchor's matrix verb. The subject pronoun *it* shares tense, number and gender features with the subject of the anchor. The type of tag question in the statement is positive polarity and the tag is negative polarity. Tim points out with the tag question *But Mrs. Kumaratunga, your statement not once have you allowed any physical excesses against the Tamil people, it's misleading, /isn't it?* that President Chandra Kumaratunga's prior turn includes a claim or a position that requires correction, specifically by making available a contrastive formulation of the state of affairs at Tamil's killing. Tim disaligns with the projected trajectory of the question sequence by calling into question a claim embedded in President Chandra Kumaratunga's statement. It can be seen from President Chandra Kumaratunga's response *I'm telling you, you are taking it out of context, I was talking there of what the last government did, and that...,* the challenge does not contribute to a complete change in the direction of talk: President Chandra Kumaratunga moves on to provide a negatively evaluative account of Tamil

people. A disalignment turn *But Mrs. Kumaratunga, your statement not once have you allowed any physical excesses against the Tamil people, it's misleading, /isn't it?* may involve a display of negative affect or evaluation and be accomplished by a disagreement. Tim uses tag question to negate or contradict a claim or position embedded in the prior turn.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the result, most of tag questions in this study follow general rule in forming tag questions: (positive-negative or vice versa). Reversed polarity tag is attached to a sentence where the interviewer is putting forward as his own to get the interviewer confirmation. There is data where the polarity value of tag question is identical with that of the anchoring clause (positive positive). The constant polarity has a function as the turn-allocation to conduct a positive response. The auxiliary *be* and its inflected forms are the most frequently used auxiliary, followed by *do*. The data indicates that the auxiliary in the tag question is sometimes chosen, depending on the speaker's intention. The most frequently used pronoun in tag questions is the non-personal third-singular *it* followed by the 2nd person pronoun *you*. The high frequency of *you* is expected from the predominant usage of tag questions in dialogue such as direct conversation. There are two main functions of tag questions in British news interviews, confirmation and challenge. Confirmation is only escorted by discourse marker *I mean* and *and*. The challenging use often involves direct address of the hearers such as second pronoun *you* in the tag. Challenging generally is quite often accompanied by discourse marker *but, well, so* and *and*. Discourse participants use tag questions both for inviting alignment, such as requesting confirmation and for doing disalignment actions such as challenges and disagreement.

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